

Sea Urchin Zone Council Research Subcommittee Meeting February 21, 2013 in Hallowell

DMR staff: Trisha De Graaf, Robert Russell, Linda Mercer and Maggie Hunter via phone.

SUZC members: Bill Sutter, Larry Harris, Joe Leask, Tracy Sawtelle, Dean Norris, Ian Emery, Chun Muth, Steve Eddy and Clint Richardson.

Meeting commenced at 4:30pm

L. Harris: Whiting & Denny's Bay did not work as there was no protection for the stock before re-opening. Since I began conducting research on urchins, I have heard from fishermen that there are ways to successfully move urchins. However, there is not a mechanism in place to conduct a trial, nor are there funds. If a group of fishermen that want to try to move urchins, or add urchins to an area they can't. The fact was that many of the urchins were of low quality roe in Whiting & Denny's Bay. Before the season opened, we could have moved urchins, or selectively added algae in barren areas to get a better roe content. Based on my past experience, it can be done successfully.

I. Emery: It has been done before in our area. What are you suggesting?

L. Harris: The whole purpose of this subcommittee is to put a proposal forward. Perhaps a group of fishermen decide to not fish an area for a few years, and then do an assessment of what stocks are before opening, survey to monitor each year, and then those who did sacrificing should have a say in how it is harvested. It was very frustrating for me to have the Whiting & Denny's Bay fishermen to be at the meeting before that we hosted in October to be faced with plan ahead of time.

I. Emery: It was management after the fact.

L. Harris: Robert [Russell] went up to do a survey ahead of time. But if there is some sort of trial, then there should be some plan for how it is managed. If you take initiative, it doesn't mean DMR will undertake surveys, but they can be advisory in how to collect data.

J. Leask: The subcommittee's purpose is to advise the SUZC. Are we going to move towards that?

L. Harris: Everything that is moving forward is going to be influenced by what Mick Devin put in for Legislation. If you want fishermen's initiatives...Cobscook fishermen moved urchins around, then told SUZC after the fact. Redid it the next year with DMR's help, but result was a lot of dead urchins and it was not done well.

J. Leask: Clint and I move urchins, and we have had almost 100% survival. Amanda Leland's project was not successful, but it can be done. Two ways we can repopulate shores – by moving them or by using Steve's hatchery. He had some success bringing them up to pinky nail size. Tried the lease approach, looking into it found it to be expensive and you only have a 3 year window to be profitable. Spoke to Chun about farming the bottom, each member of industry gets a piece of bottom and "farm" it. I know a biologist in Alaska who dives and is responsible for opening/shutting urchin barrens. There is a certain time of year when you can do something with the urchins. If seaweed is wrapped around them then there will be seed there next year. They will do well in good conditions. As a subcommittee, we need to focus on stabilizing resource and the population in turn will improve – adding to the numbers. Only thing I have seen that will do that, short of Mother Nature herself, have had a number of good ledges where they have bounced back, but there is a limit. Beds that are in tidal current, there is seed the following year where urchins have spread out.

L. Harris: We are talking about some approach, other than Zone 1 and 2, that are smaller in focus for management, or at least a series of ledges in some areas and a couple of fishermen in an area that want to take the initiative to demonstrate they can remain viable or increase in number, then the FMP should have some way that that experiment can go forward, with the understanding that there is a certain amount of protection that goes along with it. It needs to

be a two way street, so it can provide models for others to use going forward. Every part of this coast is also unique, so what works in Cobscook Bay may not work in Casco Bay. Casco Bay is a large area, but if there is an area that can be productive, there may be others in the nearby region that can work.

B. Sutter – what we are really talking about it is the FMP. We have already done the Goals and Objectives, and it passed unanimously. Fishery, Biology, all was approved at the last meeting as well. The next step in any undertaking is the action plan to achieve it. That is what we are talking about next. That is where we need to stop and think about what we want to do next. We can continue with larger zones and one size fits all for these larger zone, i.e. what you catch them with, how you catch them. Where do you end up? We need to ask ourselves this: is it time for something different? If we are going to do something different, there are only 10 licensed processor left, and only 5-7 that really are left to handle our product. The truth is that we can't sell these things out of a back of a truck. We need to figure out something that will help those guys (processor) survive on. How are we going to achieve that goal? Joe touched on it, Steve is working on it, I have spoken to scientists who know reproduction and biology and know how to grow them. What I have heard is I can get them up to as big as end of my thumb at a reasonable cost, but then they need to rely on Mother Nature. Some areas along coast of Maine rely on Mother Nature – some places where there are always urchins. It behooves us to know where those are. Zone 1 has been basically closed for 10 years and you can put your thumb on the total area fished and it essentially has not improved, with no one fishing.

I. Emery: This is a research subcommittee. Larry spoke about a certain project. Is this another?

B. Sutter: No. The SUZC charged the Subcommittee to develop the FMP. This Subcommittee has wordsmithed the proposed verbiage of the FMP, and then that goes to SUZC. Goals and Objective in the draft document were done by Subcommittee and SUZC, which adopted those in the FMP. Next thing we have to do is an action plan and that is what we are starting out with now. The next meeting was when we were supposed to do it, in November, but we had to postpone meeting until now due to DMR staff resources required for the scallop and shrimp fisheries. Now we are ready to go to the next step which is action plan.

I. Emery: So this is an assignment that SUZC assigned to SC?

B. Sutter: Yes, we accomplished the Goals & Objections, Fishery, Biology....that is as far as we got. First, we need to come to some sort of consensus on where we want to go? What can we do so we can find out what is sustainable and provide a predictable supply?

D. Norris: We need some sort of framework for our enhancement efforts. I have seen people be successful. But we have to use our limited days to move urchins.

B. Sutter: You are thinking inside box.

D. Norris: I think we need days to move mixed urchins, there is a time when crab predation moves down. There should be days provided to move mixed urchins.

L. Harris: Page 5 of the FMP - how do you promote growth of the resource? Is it possible to allow for creative initiatives to harvesters to ensure there are adequate ways they can benefit from those efforts. You say you want to get paid by the council to do this?

D. Norris: It is a self-sustaining activity.

B. Sutter: I saw we need a new paradigm.

L. Harris: There has to be a mechanism by which you get the green light for how you are going to do it. This is in the information that we are going to collect, and this is the viable result of how this is going to happen. A lot of creative fishermen, however, they are prohibited to go out and show real initiative because someone else will come and take their urchins.

B. Sutter: Or, the exiting legislation to allow for it.

D. Norris: Can't you do an urchin lease?

T. De Graaf: What are there demonstrated strategies for success?

B. Sutter: That is not the kind of detail we want to get to now. Those are the details that come later.

J. Leask: Just like the FMP goals and objective exercise. There are ideas if we could put them out there, each of us have done things that have worked, we have the experience that we can pass along.

B. Sutter: Those are the details, first we have to decide if we want to make the change.

J. Leask: We are still operating within the constraints and laws currently.

B. Sutter: Mick Devin has a bill in legislature and we can decide on how to move forward.

J. Leask: We can have input?

B. Sutter: Yes, I am looking to this group for how it will go; it is a concept bill at this point.

J. Leask: You know how legislation works. In the meantime, we still have the FMP to work on.

B. Sutter: Yes. And how that bill gets written and how it moves forward. If there is any impetus to move forward? Do you write an FMP that moves us down the road in a different way?

J. Leask: We need to change.

B. Sutter: How radically different?

C. Muth: Can any diver reseed on their own coast, and take management of what they are doing?

B. Sutter: No, but this bill is a vehicle for enabling us to allow for us doing.

R. Russell: They can do it now, but only in open season.

C. Muth: If I want to reseed an island, can others take those?

J. Leask: You can lease an area, put urchins in and be responsible for them.

S. Eddy: The option is an experimental lease for 3 year [LPA: Limited Purpose Aquaculture Lease].

I. Emery: That is the cost of doing business. If expensive, then that is a product of doing business. I think there are laws on books to allow a lot of these things to move forward.

T. Smith: There is the LPA that just go passed [urchins were added to the allowable species list in 2012].

B. Sutter: It is only 400 square feet.

T. Smith: I would like to do it. One of the main problems could be put into the new bill: if you are an urchin diver and get caught harvesting someone else's LPA, then you have a hefty fine.

I. Emery: What is LPA?

T. Smith: It is a lease [Limited Purpose Aquaculture Lease] for \$50. You can get up to 4 LPAs and it is 10' X 40'. [400 square feet].

L. Mercer: You get a license from the Department.

T. Smith: There must be more penalties.

J. Leask: One of the ideas behind the LPA was bulking up urchins on a wharf for experimentation.

T. Smith: I can put urchins in a cage and leave them at my dock. It is true. I went through it with big boys at Forum. I am legally allowed to put sea urchins in a cage and maybe add seaweed.

S. Eddy: You have to feed them, technically.

T. Smith: I can pull those urchins off that dock and sell them around the world, whole. We are not allowed to do that on a boat. That should be taken out of the law. I should be able to feed them and enhance them.

T. Sawtelle: They would have to be on bottom?

B. Sutter: Possession is the issue, it's not legal.

T. Smith: I want to buy urchins from Steve, and put them out on LPA and I am worried about someone taking them. I asked Marine Patrol about theft and it is a criminal penalty. I think the 400 square feet is not quite right for me, I need a 1000 feet buffer. I would like to take the whole ledge, a bit of bigger area, but I think there is a lot of potential there. The state should let pioneers go do that, and I don't think there are a lot of folks that will want to do it. If you want a ledge, ask all urchin divers in the area, ask them if they object to me having Seal Island. If they don't object, then I get that ledge.

I. Emery: It will never happen. There are laws that allow people to go and do this. The idea of giving an island to a fishermen...I don't not see how the state would endorse a fisherman to have a claim on the island, other than the process that is in place.

T. Smith: The LPA allows for that, I can do that right now.

B. Sutter: You are thinking smaller than what will keep those guys [processors] in business.

J. Leask: But what Tristan is saying ties in to what you are saying about this bill. If this is going to go through, what Tristan is talking about is where we need to put some efforts. What Tristan, Dean and I have been doing here and now is increasing our biomass. If we can put that into bill, terrific.

B. Sutter: You can do all of these things now. I don't think some of the folks who fished the island will go for it. What is being proposed in the bill is that you have a larger area and have a group management of it.

T. Smith: I can submit an application tomorrow so I can get that island for \$200. I need protection for it.

I. Emery: But then you are asking someone in the state to protect your private island. The people who pay for marine patrol won't want that.

C. Muth: When there is a survey, are the days increased? As a processor, I want 45 days plus. We lost our consistency; we lost our volume to Russia. So we need more days to fish, that is what I am here for.

T. Smith: With the LPA, I can sell you sea urchin any time a year.

C. Muth: The way the market works, you cannot sell any time. There is a certain time of a year they put urchins on the menu. How many totes will you supply? How many people have same idea as you have? I have been processing for 20 years; I need to ship 300 kilos of roe a day. 100 kilos three time a week this year and we lost part of the market to Russia. Most of the sushi bars took us out because we are too expensive and not consistent in providing product. What I am trying to come here is to find out if we can have more days? If we are not, in a couple of years, we won't have any buyers.

J. Leask: You need so much to keep people processing.

C. Muth: It takes us \$1500 to take a truck Downeast. Urchin buyers compete at the dock. We lose at the dock. The business needs to continue. You can't just stop us after 20 years; we need 300 kilo per week to keep processors working.

Machun: If you are not consistent, then the customers in Japan will look for another supply. It doesn't have to be the best tasting, but in good condition. We like to keep supplying them every day.

T. Smith: Out of my LPA, if I could get it going and expand to full lease, then my urchins are going to be such high quality, you will sell them whole to Japan!

C. Muth: We lost that market [whole urchins] 3 year ago due to freight costs [too expensive to ship them live vs. Russia as they are much closer to the Japanese markets].

J. Wadsworth: I lost my whole urchin markets 12 years ago.

T. Smith: More than 4 LPA sites would be better.

L. Harris: Why we are trying to do this? If you look at the coast of Maine, it should be producing much much more, and should be making you wealthy and should support a sustainable urchin fishery. But the current approach is not allowing for the creativity that will allow it to grow back. Cutting the number of days and allowing the number of license to go down is not working. There are creative ways and resources like in Cobscook Bay and aquaculture where some areas could be brought back and be made more viable. The question is how to we change the management approach to allow for this, for you to succeed and have product.

T. Smith: You need to allow guys like us to thrive.

D. Norris: Our coast varies a lot in productivity. For a big idea, Joe Casey told me when he fished Petit Manan Bar; he would count 50 boats during a 5 day/week season. If you do math, that one bar was producing what the entire state produces now. The LPA area is too small for a lease and you are subject to poaching. If a bigger area, like Petit Manan was zoned and allowed 5 days per week to go to junk beds and move product successfully, that might work. But right now, you are limited as you lose fishing days to do this.

B. Sutter: This whole thing [Devin's Bill] came from a conversation Chun and I had. Kiss your business good buy if don't do anything. None of us can afford to have an aquaculture lease to have the kind of production that is going to keep those guys [processors] in business. What we need is a larger volume and they can make some money.

D. Norris: If you get a group of people working together in a highly productive area, like in Alaska. In a specific area, you are not limited by the season. Alaskan fishermen agree on \$0.08/lb price and agree on what comes out of zone and then it is self-funding reseeding. You don't have to rely on state for money, and can move from an area. Need to start by identifying the areas that are most productive. Petit Manan has nothing now, but used to be high productive.

B. Sutter: Everything you said is exactly what needs to be done. This can no longer be an individual thing; it has to be a combined effort.

J. Leask: It has to be both.

B. Sutter: What happens if you were to say, there is an area to support enough people to do it right. I want to set that area up as an exclusive zone. You can sign in, have a cooperative group, but you are out of everywhere else. It is sea ranching, not aquaculture. You can't get a big enough area with an LPA. Atchan Tamaki told me in Japan that the processors buy from group of fishermen, the coop.

C. Muth: This is what happened in Canada, [harvesters were given] an exclusive area. Take the bottom line and can't touch it if not ready. Can the state do that?

B. Sutter: We now have roughly 400 licenses that currently own the urchin resource in Maine.

I. Emery: Then you are looking at the lobster model [Zones]?

J. Leask: We have come full circle. All these plans are wonderful, if we have urchins to work with. Steve is starting to tackle this. We, in our own efforts have approached this in different ways. We need the entire group, because Atchan has spoken about this. You need 100 totes a day.

C. Muth: What if the state takes all licenses back, and resells them? You have 400 licenses and then have a lottery. You don't like it [the license], you sell it.

I. Emery: An industry buy back. We have done it in other fisheries. If guys who are too old, they can sell out. The Feds have done this. However, there is nothing in law that allows for that.

J. Leask: If I sell my groundfish license, it's not coming back.

C. Muth: There are 370 total licenses? The state takes all licenses, and then creates 400 zones.

J. Leask: The FMP talks about that.

C. Muth: That way you can maintain your own fishing grounds, if you don't want to fish, you can sell it.

D. Norris: Everyone will want the same zones.

J. Leask: All our plans need to start with having the resource first.

B. Sutter: What is total goal for biomass to support?

C. Muth: I need 500 totes/week, for 6 month.

B. Sutter: How many would the other processors would need?

C. Muth: 5 processors would need that many per week.

B. Sutter: You would need 65,000 totes at roughly 100lbs. So 5 million lbs.

J. Wadesworth: But how good are they!?

B. Sutter: How many totes does someone need to have a reasonable season?

C. Muth: Put in a limit of 8 totes with 45-50 days.

T. Sawtelle: You are going to get a better product with a tote limit.

I. Emery: Good point.

C. Muth: We agreed to 8 toes for a 3 day week for 8 month, with a 4 month overlap.

J. Wadesworth: We still need to agree on a way to increase the biomass.

C. Muth: Decrease to 3 months then.

J. Wadesworth: You will lose market presence.

C. Muth: If there are less days, then we are going to lose our market. If we are going to lose more days, we rather have the season more compact, so 3 months.

Machun: We need to be consistent.

J. Leask: Are you struggling this year?

Machun: YES!

C. Muth: We are struggling with 2-3 days a month. Rather have the season shorter, a more compacted season.

Machun: We need the skilled workers. No one will work one day a week.

C. Muth: Newfoundland has a big source of urchins, but there are no processors.

J. Wadesworth: They won't allow us to ship whole urchins across the border.

C. Muth: We want to keep jobs, but can't find good workers. It is the same with New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Machun: If they could processor urchins there, they would do it. But they can't find skilled workers in Canada.

C. Muth: We in Portland and Scarborough, we process it all. We need more days.

J. Leask: With all these ideas, we can increase the biomass of what is on our shores.

C. Muth: But how many people are willing to put more money, effort and time to do this?

J. Leask: I bet people will.

T. Smith: There are only 400 licenses.

B. Sutter: And only 240 of them are active.

T. Smith: The draggers won't do enhancement.

J. Leask: That may be true in some sense, but not others. I have draggers that I have worked around that have re-seeded areas. Divers kill urchins as well. I run a dragger as well. They move urchins, and they leave some in spots and spread them out.

T. Smith: Then let people be pioneers. Get the costs down. Use Dean's idea to get the big urchins with little urchins. Put seaweed on them, more spawn in water, you will have a better product, we will have extra days. That is the solution. You gotta let the pioneers do it. It is so labor intensive and risky. I have a beautiful spot in Zone 1, perfect for aquaculture. I could lose them all, it is labor intensive to get lease, put seaweed on them. I am not going to spend 10,000\$ to get lease.

J. Leask: We need to get the regular SUZC meeting going.

Adjourned at 6:00pm.

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